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President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda items 68

Promotion and protection of human rights

(a) Implementation of human rights instruments

Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The President: Fifty years ago, the General Assembly made a historic advancement in our efforts to promote and protect human rights across our globe through the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This landmark achievement built upon the commitments of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by legally obligating States, for the first time, to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights inherent in each and every individual.

In the 50 years since their adoption, the International Covenants have become cornerstones of both international law and the international human rights framework, based upon the fundamental recognition of the universality, indivisibility and independent nature of human rights. Across our world, they have helped to shape constitutions, laws, policies and justice systems. They have had a transformative effect on the lives of people across the globe. This has been so because the power of the International Covenants resides in their ability to protect universal rights and freedoms in diverse circumstances and situations. And the expert committees that are upholding the implementation of the International Covenants have ensured that their provisions continue to frame our policy responses to a complex and rapidly changing world.

Despite the great progress we have made, we live in times when people across our world are being denied their most fundamental human rights. Violent extremism is on the rise and waves of intolerance and hate are targeting minorities, migrants and our most vulnerable. Greater restrictions are being placed on our most basic rights and freedoms, including the rights to life, liberty and security; equality before the law; to gender equality, education and health; to freedom of expression, worship and association and to freedom from discrimination, torture, slavery and hunger. Today's commemoration is a timely reminder of the power of these Covenants to ensure that States uphold the rights of all their people.

As Governments, civil society and the global public focus on ramping up implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the mutually reinforcing nature of the pillars of human rights, peace and security and development could not be clearer. When people's human rights are violated, when they live in fear, when they are affected by conflict and violence, when they are subject to discrimination, marginalization, intolerance, poverty and corruption, neither sustainable development nor sustainable peace is attainable.

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The 2030 Agenda is premised on the fundamental recognition of human rights for all. In taking a comprehensive and integrated approach to development, the 2030 Agenda encapsulates the indivisibility and interdependence of the human rights set forth in both Covenants. An effective implementation of the Agenda requires that this be done in a manner consistent with the United Nations Charter, international treaties and international law. Done the right way, work to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Human Rights Covenants will have to proceed hand in hand.

Indeed, the mantra of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind recalls the principles of non-discrimination and equality that underlie the two Covenants. Sustainable Development Goal 16 — promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and effective and accountable institutions — is fundamental to achieving success under all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I call on all Member States that have yet to ratify either or both Covenants to take the opportunity of this commemorative year to do so. The promotion and protection of human rights is a commitment that requires constant vigilance by us all. Allow me here to quote John Donne's celebrated verse:

"Any man's death diminishes me,

because I am involved in mankind,

And therefore never send to know for whom

the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

These words ring as true today as when they were written 400 years ago. Let us therefore mark the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Covenants by reaffirming our commitment to realizing the rights of all people, protecting those who are suffering injustice, fighting xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination, promoting equality and empowerment and increasing global awareness and understanding of human rights as fundamental to all lives. There is much we can do better in our efforts to realize political, economical and social rights of mankind. And in doing so, we will do well to aim for greater respect and stronger implementation of the two Covenants we celebrate today.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I am honoured to join the members of the Assembly today in marking a truly momentous occasion and to convey a message of support from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Half a century ago, the General Assembly adopted the two International Human Rights Covenants, completing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to form the International Bill of Human Rights. This marked the beginning of a global constitution of human rights protection. The adoption galvanized the consensus view that the protection and realization of human rights is fundamental to building resilient, inclusive and peaceful societies, as the President just stated. The Covenants have inspired international human rights instruments and influenced national constitutions the world over. They have guided national and regional courts and provided a normative foundation for the work of national independent human rights institutions. They have confirmed a common universal language of human rights, at the heart of which remains the right to life. The abolition of the death penalty has advanced significantly, but we must step up our efforts towards ending this inhumane practice of executions once and for all.

On another level, the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights remind States parties to the two Covenants that they have to account publicly for their human rights performance. The Committees are crucial for the support and guidance of States in their implementation of human rights. They also help victims in many countries to seek remedies when rights are breached. Our aim must be the universal ratification of the Covenants, including the right of petition under their Optional Protocols and their full and effective realization for all people.

Regrettably, serious human rights violations remain a huge challenge. I refer here to all human rights: political, civil, economic, social and cultural. I think of protecting civil liberties in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism; of preventing famine; of upholding social protection even in troubled economic times; of respecting religious freedom, tolerance and freedom from discrimination for all, including migrants; of shielding everyone from all forms of violence, especially women and children; and of creating space for free speech, for free media and for human rights defenders to act without intimidation.

In a world of widespread suffering, war, poverty and discrimination, the fiftieth anniversary is an appropriate moment to rally around the Covenants'

principles and vision. The Covenants remind us how the carnage stemming from conflict and blatant disrespect for human rights and humanitarian law is utterly inexcusable. They admonish us to never accept extreme poverty, intolerance, inequality or injustices.

We have more knowledge, tools and even resources now than ever before. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides us with a global blueprint to implement the Covenants in a broader and deeper sense. The Covenants in turn support stronger accountability in respect of the Sustainable Development Goals. In parallel, the United Nations Human Rights Up Front initiative aims to enhance the ability of the United Nations system to prevent and respond in a timely fashion to serious human rights violations before they turn into mass atrocities, as we have seen occur in so many cases.

All human rights are universal, interrelated, inalienable and indivisible. They form the bedrock of a humane world. Let us reaffirm this vision and turn it into realities in all corners of the world. Let us pledge to strengthen our political commitment to the Covenants: to guarantee freedom from fear and freedom from want and to protect human rights for all.

The President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, I should like to consult members with a view to inviting the following speakers to make statements on this occasion, as mentioned in my letter dated 6 October 2016: Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Mr. Fabian Omar Salvioli, Chair of the Human Rights Committee; and Mr. Waleed Sadi, Chair of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite these speakers to make statements at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Mr. Al Hussein (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights): Half a century ago, our forebears in this Assembly unanimously adopted two great covenants and brought the force of law to the principles laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those covenants distilled the bitter lessons learnt from warfare, genocide, colonial oppression and economic devastation into a legal code, creating a blueprint to build a different, more just and peaceful world.

Perhaps never in the history of the United Nations has it been so important to recall that the human rights principles embodied in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights provide the foundation on which to build justice, prosperity and peace, both among and within nations; on which to build opportunities and ensure that every individual and every society can develop to their full potential; and on which to build justice and respect for diverse opinions, origins and faiths. At a time of deepening turmoil, with rising antagonism and increasingly callous disregard for the human suffering generated by conflict and deprivation, we can take stock of the world we have built as a result of these binding agreements, their fundamental wisdom and humanity and their promise of a safer, fairer future. We can fulfil their pledge.

All the world's people have a right to life and to be free of torture, slavery and discrimination. They have a right to freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. They have electoral rights and the right to a fair trial. They have a right to education, to an adequate standard of living, to fair wages and to safe working conditions. They have a right to decent housing, to the highest attainable standard of health, and to adequate protection when they are vulnerable by virtue of age, sickness or accident. These are not empty words, but rights. Every State represented in this Hall has sworn to be accountable to its people in ensuring these rights are respected. They are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. They are interlocking, and the societies they build are resilient and strong.

The Covenants have been a lifeline for millions of women, men and children over the past 50 years. They have helped to shape the constitutions of many nations represented in this Hall, and they are deeply grounded in their laws. They have taught us to turn away from discrimination, whether based on race, gender, ethnicity, religious faith, political opinion, sexual orientation or any other characteristic. They have shown us how to build rule-of-law institutions that are impartial, transparent and accessible. They have demonstrated

that policy can be securely anchored in the expressed will of the people when there is greater freedom.

The Covenants continue to bear fruit. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change both draw deeply from their power — the drive to end discrimination on any grounds and to build governance that is grounded in civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

This structure of law and principle is our most precious inheritance from past generations, and it is the most valuable legacy we can pass on to our children. Dag Hammarskjöld said:

"To build for man a world without fear, we must be without fear. To build a world of justice, we must be just."

He also said:

> "The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and its errors, its successes and its setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned."

Will it be our generation that breaks away from the human rights principles drawn up to save the world from the horror of the past? Will it be we who set off that return to injustice, hate, war, imperialism and the exploitive and oppressive exercise of naked power? In a tide of hatred and divisiveness, deep and vital principles may be swept away unheeded. The world's States cannot durably address poverty, climate change, migration, conflicts or terrorism without effective international cooperation in a system that upholds human dignity and equality. There will be no peace, development, safety or future if we ignore the rights of the people — all the world's people.

We cannot know what crises the next 50 years will bring. But when institutions do not protect the people or guard against injustice, or when they fail to share common resources equitably and safeguard the people's rights, social cohesion is shattered and the risk of division and violence is high. States can set our shared planet on a course of greater inclusion, more sustained prosperity and more justice, dignity, freedom and peace. States can embrace the voices of the people rather than cutting short that most precious resource.

The Covenants, through the excellent work of the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, continue to guide States and assist individuals in seeking remedies for violations. In today's troubled global context, the treaty body system is sorely needed. I encourage the Assembly to act on the recommendations of the Secretary-General in the report before us (A/71/118) in order to ensure that the treaty bodies can provide the most effective support possible.

Human rights offer States a path towards greater stability, not less. They ensure that disputes can be peacefully resolved, and they can build confidence, loyalty and thriving political and economic institutions. The most effective way to create societies that are cohesive and resilient is to build justice, dignity, equality and development, in a system that protects the full human rights of every individual.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Covenants must be an occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the International Bill of Human Rights, the great tripod of principle and commitment that is formed by the two Covenants and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those texts are the bedrock of sound governance and in them lives the world's hope for peace.

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now call on the Chair of the Human Rights Committee.

Mr. Salvioli (Human Rights Committee) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to commend you, Mr. President, and the General Assembly for the decision to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. I would also like to warmly thank the Deputy Secretary-General, my friend the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and my colleague Mr. Waleed Sadi, Chair of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Today's commemoration of the anniversary of the two International Covenants on Human Rights is a very significant moment in history. Half a century ago, in a moving meeting in this very Hall, we witnessed the adoption of both instruments and the first Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The then President of the General Assembly, in 1966, said with great clarity that universal respect for human rights is inseparable from the idea of world peace, that therefore the steps taken in the field of human rights must be made effective and that States should participate in the new Covenants universally and without reservations (see A/PV.1496). At the same

meeting the then Secretary-General stressed the fact that the two Covenants were approved unanimously, in a demonstration of the political maturity and positive leadership that existed at the time.

Fifty years have passed since then. As of today, 168 States have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; 115 have ratified its first Optional Protocol, empowering the Human Rights Committee to receive, process and resolve individual communications; and 81 have ratified its second Optional Protocol, on the abolition of the death penalty. Those numbers are evidence of our progress and of States' growing willingnes to commit to civil and political rights.

Since 1977, the Human Rights Committee has been complying with its task of interpreting and applying the Covenant. Over those four decades, it has made a significant contribution to the case law on civil and political rights, thereby promoting the development of international human rights law to the benefit of individuals. By the process of reviewing the reports of States, the Committee, through its concluding observations, has carried out effective public scrutiny of legislation, policies and practices of the various State organs.

The Committee also interprets and applies the Covenant through its examination of individual communications. To date, it has received about 2,760 complaints and considered more than 1,150. The quality of the Committee's jurisprudence is recognized at every level and is taken into account by national, regional and international courts, including the International Court of Justice, which in its judgment in the *Diallo* case said that great weight should be given to the Committee's interpretation of the Covenant. Other bodies of independent experts, including the intergovernmental Human Rights Council, also use the documents that the Committee adopts to carry its work forward.

Throughout this period, we have been able to arrive at best practices for implementing our concluding observations and investigations, which have been greatly assisted by the Committee's follow-up procedures, the work of national human rights institutions and of course by civil society organizations. But none of that would be possible if we could not depend on the political will of the States.

The general comments, in which the Committee interprets the Covenant's provisions, documents that serve as a useful guide for States, are another important achievement. To date, we have adopted 35 general comments, and we are drafting a new one on the right to life, with broad participation by States and non-governmental organizations. Those achievements have been made possible by the excellent work that has been done by the women and men on the Committee, throughout its history and today, with expertise, commitment and outstanding quality. I would like to take this opportunity to express my admiration for them and to offer my sincere and heartfelt tribute and acknowledgement to my colleagues, past and present.

There are great challenges ahead of us in an enormously complex world. The International Covenants and the Committees' decisions represent an outstanding road map to a better future for our societies. It is urgent that we regain those values of interdependence and indivisibility and end our biased approaches to analysing social, civil, economic, political and cultural rights. In our judicial acts we must reject artificial categories and leave behind nineteenth-century principles. The guiding criteria for our actions should be a people-centred perspective and the full wealth of international human rights law. There is therefore no reason for not having universal ratification of the Covenants. States should become parties to them and their Protocols without delay or reservations.

States should submit reports on time; act in good faith in proceedings; encourage civil society's participation; and establish internal mechanisms for quick and effective compliance with the concluding observations and expert opinions of the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They should propose the best-qualified people — expert, independent and impartial — as candidates for the Committees. Those qualities, along with equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, are the only ones that should guide the election process. States should actively support the work of the Committees, in word and deed, defend their impartiality and functions and provide the secretariats with the resources they need to fulfil their mandates.

It is decided, firm, permanent measures such as these, taken in every area, that are the best tribute to the International Covenants and to the people who had the foresight and the courage to formulate and adopt them. Using their expertise, the Committees must interpret and apply them with a view to achieving their universality, interdependence and indivisibility, while those here, the States Members of the United Nations,

have the great privilege of formulating and executing the public policy that can render them effective for the benefit of humankind.

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now call on the Chair of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Mr. Sadi (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights): We are assembled here today to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of two key human rights covenants: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its twin, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I emphasize the word "twin" because I believe that ultimately they are inseparable.

The narrative of the adoption of the two basic human rights instruments shows beyond the shadow of a doubt — and we must not lose sight of the fact — that they complement one another, in every sense of the word, and that they were delivered in order to give full expression to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The Declaration did not deal separately with the two dimensions of human rights, but rather jointly, affirming that for all intents and purposes the two Covenants are indeed inseparable. A close friend of mine once said that they are more or less like the two wings of the same bird, which cannot fly without both. I hope we can all remember that example, simple and yet to the point. Who are we to challenge this article of faith, which the Declaration embodied and espoused, that they are inseparable and indivisible?

We all now adhere faithfully to the proposition that human rights are interdependent and inseparable from one another. On that basis alone, the two Covenants, which aim to address civil and political rights in conjunction with economic, social and cultural rights, cannot fulfil their mandates separately from one another for much longer. Last summer, we made a modest move, with the two Committees meeting jointly, and I hope that modest move will be repeated vis-à-vis the other treaty bodies, because if we are faithful to the proposition that human rights are indivisible, we must pursue them in a joint, coordinated and cooperative manner. I am afraid that we are not yet on that road, but in the modest move we made last summer, our two Committees held hands and tried to see where they could have better coordination and cooperation.

We in the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have repeatedly seen that the sets of rights that we are trying to promote and protect cannot be fully realized without taking into consideration their civil and political contexts. And I submit that that goes for every treaty body we have. They all have the same need for more coordination and cooperation. We have made a modest move in that direction, but I think we should do it faster and more boldly in the future. By way of example, one cannot enjoy the rights to food, work, housing, education, health and culture if one's political and civil environment is not adequate and conducive to their enjoyment. The denial of one set of rights will frustrate and impede the realization of and respect for the other sets.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite all countries that have not yet ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to do so. We have 164 member States. I would like to make a special appeal to the United States, which has almost alone stayed out of this club, and which I fear sends the wrong signal. I hope that through this forum, perhaps, the United States can be invited in. I hope the United States delegation is here this morning and can make an effort to join the rest of the international community in becoming a party to our treaty.

I hope today's commemoration will serve our ultimate purpose. My single and most important message is to urge that we have greater collaboration and cooperation between the two treaty bodies, because otherwise I believe we will be going in the wrong direction.

The President: I call on the representative of Kuwait, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait): I am honoured to speak today on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States at our commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as called for in General Assembly resolution 70/144 under the agenda item entitled "Promotion and protection of human rights". Both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are just as significant today as they were at their adoption in 1966.

The Covenants' foundation is the recognition that every human being has human rights, and that it is the obligation of each State to promote and preserve

those rights. Since their inception 50 years ago, both Covenants have continued to reflect ideals and goals that we have never ceased to desire to achieve. Moreover, given the continued conflicts going on around the world, resulting in a staggering total of 65.3 million refugees and internally displaced persons, we are currently facing the most challenging of struggles. Never has the desire for peace and security been so evident. All States are encouraged to implement the goals that both of these Covenants embody and to continue to aspire to a world free of fearand violence.

The fiftieth anniversary serves as a reminder of the obligation to protect and defend each individual's basic human rights and to commit to taking administrative and legislative measures to preserve those rights, as stated in the treaties, thereby reinforcing the aspirations of each and every human being to live in dignity, peace and security, as we all rightly deserve.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): It is my honour to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States to join our voices in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These two Covenants, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, form a major cornerstone of international human rights law. We welcome the holding of this timely meeting to once again underscore the universal, inalienable, interdependent and indivisible nature of all human rights set forth in the Covenants.

The Eastern European States reaffirm their strong commitment to the Covenants, which represent an essential tool for the fulfilment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals. We recall the primary responsibility of States to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Fifty years ago, the Covenants set out the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights that are the birthright of all human beings. During the past five decades, the world has dramatically changed. The increasing threats and pressing challenges facing us today — including the spread of international terrorism, racial, ethnic and religious intolerance and the migration crisis — once again underline the role of the international community in ensuring the better protection of human rights.

Today, as we reflect on the significant progress achieved since the adoption of the Covenants, we have to note that challenges remain in securing basic human rights and freedoms for all. Millions of people, especially children, women and persons with disabilities, continue to suffer from various forms of violence, discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Thousands still suffer from grave human rights violations during conflicts, and in that regard, we use this opportunity to underline the importance of the work of the relevant treaty bodies, such as the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

We strongly believe that every individual deserves to enjoy both sets of rights covered by the Covenants without any discrimination on any ground, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Special attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups.

We share the view that the fundamental human rights enshrined in the Covenants should be applied equally to everyone. We need to take more effective steps to protect the human rights of all, and this landmark occasion gives us an opportunity to call on all States to ensure the universal ratification and effective implementation of both Covenants. In that regard, we appreciate the year-long "Our Rights, Our Freedoms, Always" campaign of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to promote and raise awareness on both Covenants.

As we embark on the ambitious 15-year journey towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is important that we strive to achieve its goals as a major factor contributing to the promotion of human rights, including through the implementation of States' obligations under the Covenants.

On behalf of the Eastern European States, we would like to once again reiterate our strong commitment to ensuring the full protection of all human rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, who will speak on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), on whose behalf I am speaking, is particularly pleased to participate in this fiftieth-anniversary commemoration of the adoption by the General Assembly of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Those instruments, together with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties, set out the essential foundation of the rights and fundamental freedoms to be enjoyed by all human beings simply because they are human.

The International Covenants on Human Rights have achieved global significance and relevance. They reinforce the universal, indivisible, interdependent and mutually supportive nature of all human rights. Respect for and the promotion and implementation of those instruments is a primary duty of every State party, and a source of legitimate interest to the international community. Their implementation requires and benefits from a cooperative approach that can be fostered by universal and regional human rights systems, particularly as regards building and strengthening the capacities needed to make progress in their compliance.

Human rights are recognized as one of the three basic pillars of the United Nations and are closely and directly linked to development and international peace and security. There are all too many examples demonstrating that a serious and systematic pattern of human rights violations can undermine international peace and stability, and that if we do not ensure and defend the dignity of all persons without exception in the face of violence, intolerance and exclusion, we will undermine efforts to effectively guarantee the rights enshrined in the International Human Rights Covenants and the work of the organs responsible for monitoring their implementation.

The International Covenants on Human Rights respond to the conviction that peace is very difficult to maintain or achieve without a decent standard of living for all commensurate with human dignity. We recognize that through those international instruments it is of the utmost importance to protect the right to life and personal integrity, promote individual economic security, and ensure that everyone can enjoy all their fundamental freedoms as elements of paramount importance to personal and social development. This means that poverty, inequality and inadequate access to food, health, education, housing and justice deprive people of the opportunity to develop their full potential.

In that conviction, the countries of Latin American and Caribbean place equal emphasis on the critical importance of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights, and on the concomittant duty of all States to respect and promote them, allocating the resources necessary to build peaceful and inclusive societies that ensure prosperity and peace. In that regard, we also emphasize that the right to development is an integral part of the human rights corpus, for which our Organization must work tirelessly.

That vision is reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted last year, which incorporates a human rights-based approach and recognizes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties as a cross-cutting element essential to balanced attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, which were established in order to leave no one behind.

Now that our world is strongly interconnected as a result of development, progress, science, transportation and information technologies, States must work with all relevant stakeholders — including civil society organizations, businesses, academia and national human rights institutions, among others — in order to build a better response to common human rights challenges. A shared commitment to enhancing these universally recognized human rights for all is therefore essential.

In the same vein, one priority for GRULAC is and will continue to be to provide assistance and implement measures to effectively protect and promote the human rights of vulnerable persons and groups so as to fully realize all rights enshrined in the International Covenants and other international human rights instruments, paying particular attention to the empowerment of women and girls, the promotion of gender equality, and the rights of children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, migrants and the elderly, among others, in order to ensure that all human beings can live in a region and a world with greater equality, justice, security and well-being.

Despite the magnitude of the challenges that we face on this anniversary, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean renew their determination

and their profound commitment as they pursue this noble endeavour.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary since the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights were conceived and 40 years since they entered into force. In conjunction with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Covenants marked a turning point in the formal recognition by States of the rights of the individual, that every person is born with equal rights — civil, political, cultural, economic and social — and should be able to exercise those rights without fear of persecution or oppression.

The anniversary of the Covenants is a time to take stock of the global human rights situation and to join our common efforts. In too many States human rights are under threat, and the fight against terrorism or cultural relativism is used to justify human rights violations. In that context, our responsibility is to defend the universality of human rights enshrined in the international treaties that we uphold.

The significance of the Covenants is self evident. Today, the most unstable and insecure regions around the globe are those where the principles enshrined in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are either neglected or opposed, where inequality and prejudice are most prominent and where oppression is rife. People expect accountability from their Governments and freedom and dignity for themselves. We must work together — national Governments, international organizations and civil society — to protect and strengthen human rights. Let us also consider how we work with Governments that are yet to sign or ratify the Covenants.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights remain as important today as when they were adopted. We are committed to working to ensure that those rights continue to be upheld and that we hold ourselves and each other to the highest possible standard. That can be achieved only through deeper cooperation with one another, with civil society and with the accountability mechanisms enshrined in international treaties. Fulfilling the rights set out in the Covenants is too important to be left to chance.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Mendelson (United States of America): As has been noted by many, human rights is a core pillar of the Charter of the United Nations. In the Preamble of the Charter, the Member States "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

The Universal Declaration and the International Covenants on Human Rights are central to achieving that mission. Upon the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt remarked,

> "As we here bring to fruition our labours on this Declaration of Human Rights, we must at the same time rededicate ourselves to the unfinished task which lies before us."

Over the next several years, the international community then worked together to negotiate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, work which was concluded in 1966. It is the reason why we celebrate today. In signing the International Covenants in 1977, President Carter observed that when a Government ratifies the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it acknowledges "explicitly that there are sharp limits on its own powers over the lives of its people". The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, meanwhile, recognizes that Governments are the instruments and servants of their people.

Both these Covenants express values in which the people of my country have believed for a long time. As we mark this occasion today, the United States supports the goals of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and strongly reaffirms our commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The United States reiterates its

commitment to human rights in its work in the General Assembly, within the Human Rights Council and across the many other bodies promoting the protection of human rights within the United Nations.

A decade ago, we were one of the strongest supporters of the universal periodic review process, and we remain fully committed to its vital function of guiding Member States to improve respect for human rights domestically. We see that process as extremely valuable, given its universality. It reviews the human rights situation in every country, including our own.

The United States developed six working groups tasked to review and consult with civil society on a range of human rights issues — including civil rights and non-discrimination; criminal justice; economic, social and cultural rights; indigenous issues and the environment; national security; immigration, labour, migrants, trafficking, and children — and domestic implementation and international mechanisms.

Given that the global trend of closing space for civil society threatens the very rights created by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, I want to highlight the important roles of the Special Rapporteurs on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of expression and the situation of human rights defenders. All three mandates are crucial to protecting and promoting the international human rights obligations in the Covenant. We are committed to the implementation of our obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights because it helps create the environment most conducive for steady progress toward the achievement of the goals of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Experience reveals that when people can exercise fundamental freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and religion or belief without fear; when they have access to a wide range of ideas, information and opinion; when they can actively participate in the political life of their country and press for reform without reprisal; when laws are instruments of justice and not tools of repression; when journalists and advocates can expose abuse and corruption; and when domestic safeguards protect minorities from the potential tyranny of a Government that fails to guarantee free expression, to respect the will of its people, and to protect the interests of all individuals equally without distinction, then societies become more resilient, more inclusive and more tolerant, innovation spurs economic growth and prosperity, and political change tends to be peaceful.

Today, as we commemorate the Covenants and the hard work of all of those who contributed to their creation, we remind ourselves about the current state of the world and the threats to the International Bill of Rights. We must work together to ensure that the human rights treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council and other human rights mechanisms within the United Nations are effective and enable respect for human rights worldwide.

Finally, the United States reaffirms its commitment to advancing and supporting human rights in the United Nations system and advancing human rights, fundamental freedoms, human dignity and prosperity internationally and in the United States.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 68.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.